

The Amistad Commission's Literacy Components for Primary Grades

The Amistad Movement is a coined term to describe the recent establishment of Amistad Commissions in several states across the country. While the African-American population in the United States approaches 25%, African and African-American characters, cultures, and history are minimally represented in the texts and trade books in classrooms across America. In order to address the educational needs of *all* children of *all* ethnicities in learning about diversity through the African-American experience, several states have legislated an Amistad Commission. Each Commission has its own vision and mandate, but the message remains the same: if we intend to fully educate all children of all ethnicities, we must include the history, folktales, cultural beliefs, and experiences of the African-American population in this educational process.

Of course, many schools in the United States study African-American history during the month of February. Ironically, this is the shortest month of the year, and also the month that many teachers are preparing for standardized testing. So, while we may attempt to teach African-American topics in isolation, we also choose to do so in only one short month that is already packed with test prep, Valentine's Day, and Presidents' Day. Therefore, clearly less than 5% of the school year is dedicated to learning about 20% to 25% of the population. In reality, Black History Month is a Band-Aid approach to handling a real need for diversifying our educational tools used on a daily basis.

So, how do we address this dire need for change in our schools? First of all, each teacher in each classroom across the country needs to look at the data in the classroom. How many African-American scientists are included in the science curriculum across the school year, not just during February? How many books in each classroom library depict some part of African culture, the African Diaspora, or the African-American experience? What percentage are these books of the full classroom library? Is the percentage less than 25%? What percentage of the Social Studies curriculum addresses African and/or African-American culture and experiences? Are these lessons concentrated primarily during the month of February, or are they infused throughout the school year?

This type of data can really feel uncomfortable at first, but the data needs to be gathered, analyzed, and discussed by educators. This data can be a catalyst for discussion and understanding in classrooms and faculty rooms, and can lead to a celebration of the wealth of contributions that African-Americans have made to our nation's society and development. Doesn't it seem more educationally sound to examine the situation and make rational decisions for corrective measures rather than simply ignore the situation and do a disservice to all our children?

Below you will find several links to assist you in adding a richer, more developed presentation. The books link will suggest titles to read aloud to children in grades kindergarten through four, the Lessons link will provide a few sample lesson plans of books from the book lists, and the Internet link will provide links to other websites that can assist you in doing background research or that you can make available to students in the classroom.

Of course, the African-American population is not the only population that has been ignored in our classrooms. Indeed, Hispanic-American, Native American, Middle Eastern-American, and Asian-American cultures have been marginally acknowledged in the trade books and stories read to children. Indeed, only those of European-American ancestry receive continuous and consistent recognition of their heritage in many of our classrooms. This situation must be changed if we are to truly move forward in our efforts to unite our society. We can be certain that the Amistad Movement will be followed by other movements to include more ethnicities in our daily educational plans.

As more and more Amistad Commissions are launched across the country, mandated inclusion of a more well-rounded representation of the African-American population will be required throughout the curriculum. Let's stop teaching mere tolerance, and start truly embracing the rich, amazing diversity those threads together the fabric we call America.

Reflections on Read Aloud Titles Used in America

What do you remember about family, siblings, and teachers reading to you when you were young? Which books were your favorites? We all have favorite books from our childhood, and we often most remember books that depict characters with which we can identify. I used to love Nancy Drew books as a child. My son was crazy about *The Bernstein Bears* books.

When I was in school, *Fun with Dick and Jane* was the reading text used in classrooms across the United States. These stories depicted a middle-class white family with a dog. The mother stayed home and the father went to work each day. The children were dutiful and listened to Mother and Father. When we look at these books now, we laugh because of their stereotypical nature and single dimensions. People read these books today out of a sense of nostalgia, not out of a sense of a true reflection of American life. We have grown beyond these depictions.

Yet have our children's books really changed that much? Think about the books being read in classrooms across America. Beyond the books like *The Bernstein Bears* that depict animals acting as people, more than 90% of the books depict middle-class white characters. And this lack of true integration seems to be systemic. Look at the data. Why, even the "Battle of the Books" titles, which are sanctioned by the International Reading Association and chosen by librarians, woefully under-represent children of ethnicities other than white. In fact, titles for Battle of the Books generally have a representation of **less than 10% for all other ethnicities other than white.**

Studies show that children learn self-worth and esteem through the books they read as children. Studies also show that children learn about the world around them through these same stories. If we continue to expose our children to books that only depict white faces, we are doing a vast disservice to **all** of our children. African-American children do not see characters of their same ethnicity and therefore come to believe that their ethnicity is less valuable, and this belief can also be instilled into Hispanic, Asian, and Native American children as well. Furthermore, as white children interact with other ethnicities, they may understand, accept, and appreciate less of the rich diversity of America's fabric because of the shortfall of depictions of all ethnicities in the books they read. Therefore, children of all ethnicities suffer from this underrepresentation.

Is this underrepresentation necessary? Are there simply too few books to properly represent the students present in our classroom? The answer is, "No." Plenty of books, great books, have been written that depict characters of all ethnicities.

As this site discusses learning about the African-American culture, stories, diaspora, and experience, the links below offer read aloud titles that depict African-American titles for grades kindergarten through five. You are encouraged to do further research on amazing children's books that depict other ethnicities.

Research shows that children need to have access to books that reflect their own ethnicities to develop healthy self-esteem, and children also need to have access to books with characters of other ethnicities in order to develop a respect for society's rich diversity. The titles below are excellent examples of books that reflect African and African-American characters in positive, authentic ways. Enjoy enhancing your home and classroom libraries with these titles.

Kindergarten Titles

Author	Title	Pub. Date
Aardema, Verna	<i>Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain</i>	1992
Aardema, Verna	<i>Who's in Rabbit's House?: A Masai Tale</i>	1992
Adler, David	<i>A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.</i>	1991
Adler, David	<i>A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman</i>	1993
Aliki	<i>Mummies Made in Egypt</i>	1985
Bang, Molly	<i>Ten, Nine, Eight</i>	1991
Bryan, Ashley	<i>Beautiful Blackbird</i>	2002
Bryan, Ashley	<i>Ashley Bryan's ABC of African American Poetry</i>	2001
Coleman, Evelyn	<i>To Be a Drum</i>	2004
Crews, Donald	<i>Shortcut</i>	1996
Crews, Donald	<i>Bigmama's</i>	1998
Diakite, Baba	<i>The Hatseller and the Monkeys</i>	1999
Dillon, Leo and Diane	<i>Rap A Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles - Think of That</i>	2002
Falwell, Cathryn	<i>Feast for 10</i>	1995
Feelings, Muriel L.	<i>Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book</i>	1992
Feelings, Muriel L.	<i>Moja Means One</i>	1976
Freeman, Don	<i>A Pocket for Corduroy</i>	1980
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Friendly Four</i>	2006
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Grandpa's Face</i>	1996
Hadithi	<i>Tricky Tortoise</i>	2005

Haley, Gail E.	<i>A Story, A Story</i>	1988
Hamilton, Virginia	<i>The People Could Fly: The Picture Book and CD</i>	2007
Holt, Lenny	<i>How Many Stars in the Sky?</i>	1997
Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald	<i>Aunt Flossie's Hats (And Crab Cakes Later)</i>	2001
Hudson, Katura J.	<i>Afro-Bets Quotes for Kids: Words for Kids to Live By</i>	2004
Hudson, Wade and Culverson, Blair	<i>Afro Bets Kids: I'm Gonna Be</i>	1992
Johnson, Angela	<i>Do Like Kyla</i>	1993
Johnson, Angela	<i>Daddy Calls Me Man</i>	2000
Johnson, Angela	<i>Wind Flyers</i>	2007
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>Goggles!</i>	1969
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>Peter's Chair</i>	1998
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>Whistle for Willie</i>	1977
Kimmel, Eric A.	<i>Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock</i>	1990
Kroll, Virginia	<i>Masai and I</i>	1997
Lester, Julius	<i>Tale of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit</i>	2006
McDermott, Gerald	<i>Anansi the Spider</i>	1987
McKissack, Patricia	<i>Flossie and the Fox</i>	1986
McKissack, Patricia	<i>Louis Armstrong: Jazz Musician</i>	2001
Musgrove, Margaret	<i>Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions</i>	1992
Onyefulu, Ifeoma	<i>Emeka's Gift: An African Counting Book</i>	1999
Pilkey, Dav	<i>The Paperboy</i>	1999
Pinkney, Brian	<i>Max Found Two Sticks</i>	2005
Pinkney, Brian	<i>Hush, Little Baby</i>	2005
Reid, Robin	<i>Thank You, Dr. King</i>	2003
Ringgold, Faith	<i>Tar Beach</i>	1996
Roberts, Brenda C.	<i>Jazzy Miz Mozetta</i>	2004
San Souci, Robert D.	<i>Sukey and the Mermaid</i>	1996
San Souci, Robert D.	<i>The Hired Hand</i>	2005
Smalls, Irene and Michael Hays	<i>Jonathan and His Mommy</i>	1995
Washington, Donna L.	<i>The Story of Kwanzaa</i>	1997
Williams, Karen Lynn	<i>Galimoto</i>	1991

Williams, Vera B.	<i>Cherries and Cherry Pits</i>	1988
Williams, Vera B.	<i>Music, Music for Everyone</i>	1988
Williams, Vera B.	<i>More, More, More Said the Baby</i>	1996
Yardbrough, Camille	<i>Cornrows</i>	1997

First Grade Titles

Author	Title	Pub. Date
Aardema, Verna	<i>Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears</i>	1992
Aardema, Verna	<i>Koi and the Kola Nuts: A Tale From Liberia</i>	2002
Aardema, Verna	<i>Rabbit Makes a Monkey of Lion: A Swahili Tale</i>	1993
Adler, David A.	<i>A Picture Book of Jackie Robinson</i>	1997
Adler, David A.	<i>A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass</i>	1995
Bang, Molly Garrett	<i>Wiley and the Hairy Man</i>	2001
Burleigh, Robert	<i>Langston's Train Ride</i>	2004
Caines, Jeanette Franklin	<i>Just Us Women</i>	1982
Cosby, Bill	<i>The Meanest Thing to Say</i>	1997
Cosby, Bill	<i>My Big Lie</i>	1999
Cosby, Bill	<i>The Worst Day of My Life</i>	1999
Diakite, Baba Wague	<i>The Hunterman and the Crocodile</i>	1997
Dillon, Leo and Diane	<i>Rap A Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles - Think of That</i>	2002
DuBurke, Randy	<i>The Moon Ring</i>	2002
Feelings, Muriel L.	<i>Zamani Goes to Market</i>	1992
Feelings, Tom and Eloise Greenfield	<i>Daydreamers</i>	1993
Flournoy, Valerie	<i>The Patchwork Quilt</i>	1985
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>She Come Bringing Me Tht Little Baby Girl</i>	1993
Grifalconi, Ann	<i>Village of Round an Square Houses</i>	1986
Grimes, Nikki	<i>Meet Danitra Brown</i>	1997

Havill, Juanita	<i>Jamaica's Find</i>	1987
Havill, Juanita	<i>Jamaica and Brianna</i>	1996
Hoffman, Mary	<i>Amazing Grace</i>	1991
Hru, Dakari	<i>Joshua's Masai Mask</i>	1996
Kamma, Anne	<i>If You Lived When There Was Slavery in America</i>	2004
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>Apt. 3</i>	1999
Kimmel, Eric A.	<i>Anansi and the Talking Melon</i>	1995
Kimmel, Eric A.	<i>Anansi and the Magic Stick</i>	2002
King, Martin Luther	<i>I Have a Dream</i>	2007
Krull, Kathleen	<i>Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman</i>	2000
Lindbergh, Reeve	<i>Nobody Owns the Sky: The Story of Brave Bessie Coleman</i>	1996
McDermott, Gerald	<i>Zomo the Rabbit: A Trickster Tale from West Africa</i>	1998
McKissack, Patricia	<i>The Honest to Goodness Truth</i>	2002
McKissack, Patricia	<i>Goin' Someplace Special</i>	2001
Miller, William	<i>Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree</i>	1995
Morrison, Toni	<i>Remember: The Journey to School Integration</i>	2004
Nolen, Jerdine	<i>Thunder Rose</i>	2003
Polacco, Patricia	<i>Chicken Sunday</i>	1998
Rappaport, Doreen	<i>Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.</i>	2001
Ringgold, Faith	<i>Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky</i>	1995
Robinson, Sandra Chisholm	<i>The Rainstick: A Fable</i>	1994
San Souci, Robert D.	<i>Sootface: An Ojibwar Cinderella Story</i>	1997
Schroeder, Alan	<i>Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman</i>	2000
Schroeder, Alan	<i>Ragtime Tumpie</i>	1993
Seeger, Pete	<i>Abiyoyo: Based on a South African Lullaby and Folk Story</i>	1994
Smith, Will	<i>Just the Two of Us</i>	2005
Steptoe, Javaka	<i>In Daddy's Arms, I Am Tall</i>	2001
Stolz, Mary	<i>Storm in the Night</i>	1990
Tarpley, Natasha	<i>Joe-Joe's First Fight</i>	2003
Taylor, Jacqui	<i>African ABC</i>	2005

Taylor-Butler, Christine and Devard, Nancy	<i>A Mom Like No Other</i>	2004
Teague, Mark	<i>The Secret Shortcut</i>	1999
Thomas, Joyce Carol	<i>Brown Honey and Broomwheat Tea</i>	1996
Williams, Vera B.	<i>Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe</i>	1984
Williams, Vera B.	<i>A Chair for My Mother</i>	1984
Williams, Vera B.	<i>Something Special for Me</i>	1986

Second Grade Titles

Author	Title	Pub. Date
Aardema, Verna	<i>Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain</i>	1992
Aardema, Verna	<i>Anansi Does the Impossible!: An Ashanti Tale</i>	2000
Adler, David	<i>A Picture Book of Rosa Parks</i>	1995
Adoff, Arnold	<i>Black is Brown is Tan</i>	2004
Adoff, Arnold	<i>Malcolm X</i>	2000
Barnes, Derrick D.	<i>Stop, Drop and Chill</i>	2004
Black, Sonia W.	<i>Jumping the Broom</i>	2004
Boyd, Dee	<i>Only the Stars</i>	2004
Cameron, Ann	<i>Gloria Rising</i>	2004
Coles, Robert	<i>The Story of Ruby Bridges</i>	1992
Cunnane, Kelly	<i>For You Are a Kenyan Child</i>	2006
DeGross, Monalisa and Hanna, Cheryl	<i>Donavan's Word Jar</i>	1998
Ferris, Jeri	<i>What Are You Figuring Now?: A Story About Benjamin Banneker</i>	1990
Ford, Juwanda	<i>Shop Talk</i>	2004
Giovanni, Nikki	<i>Spin a Soft Black Song</i>	1987
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Africa Dream</i>	1992
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Night on a Neighborhood Street</i>	1996
Grimes, Nikki and Cooper, Floyd	<i>Danitra Brown Leaves Town</i>	2005
Havill, Juanita	<i>Jamaica Tag-Along</i>	1989
Hoffman, Mary	<i>Starring Grace</i>	2001
Hopkinson, Deborah	<i>A Band of Angels</i>	2002
Hudson, Cheryl Willis	<i>What Do You Know? Snow!</i>	2004

Johnson, Angela	<i>The Leaving Morning</i>	1995
Kimmel, Eric A.	<i>Anansi Goes Fishing</i>	1993
Kroll, Virginia L.	<i>Africa Brothers and Sisters</i>	1993
Lester, Julius	<i>Let's Talk About Race</i>	2005
Lester, Julius	<i>Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit</i>	2006
Levine, Ellen	<i>If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King</i>	1994
Marzollo, Jean	<i>Happy Birthday Martin Luther King</i>	2005
McDermott, Gerald	<i>Anansi the Spider</i>	1987
McDonough, Yona Zeldis	<i>Who Was Louis Armstrong?</i>	2004
McGovern, Ann	<i>Wanted Dead or Alive: The Story of Harriet Tubman</i>	1991
McKissack, Patricia C.	<i>Mirandy and Brother Wind</i>	1997
Medearis, Angela Shelf	<i>Singing for Dr. King</i>	2004
Mendez, Phil	<i>Black Snowman</i>	2005
Mitchell, Margaree King	<i>Uncle Jed's Barbershop</i>	1998
Monjo, F. N.	<i>The Drinking Gourd: A Story of the Underground Railroad</i>	1993
Nelson, Vaundra Micheaux	<i>Almost to Freedom</i>	2003
Nolen, Jerdine	<i>In My Momma's Kitchen</i>	2001
Nolen, Jerdine	<i>Hewitt Anderson's Great Big Lie</i>	2005
Orgill, Roxanne	<i>If I Only Had a Horn: Young Louis Armstrong</i>	2002
Pinkney, Andrea Davis	<i>Alvin Alley, Vol. 1</i>	1995
Raschka, Chris	<i>Charlie Parker Played Be Bop</i>	2004
Ringgold, Faith	<i>Cassie's Word Quilt</i>	2004
Ringgold, Faith	<i>Tar Beach</i>	1996
San Soucie, Robert D.	<i>Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella</i>	2002
Shore, Diane, et al	<i>This is the Dream</i>	2005
Step toe, John	<i>Creativity</i>	2003
Step toe, John	<i>Stevie</i>	
Stroud, Bettye	<i>The Patchwork Path: A Quilt Map to Freedom</i>	2007
Udry, Janice May	<i>What Mary Jo Shared</i>	
Unobagha, Uzo	<i>Off to the Sweet Shores of Africa</i>	2005
Williams, Vera B.	<i>A Chair for My Mother</i>	1984
Winter, Jeanette	<i>Follow the Drinking Gourd</i>	1992

Woodson, Jaqueline	<i>Coming On Home Soon</i>	2004
Young, Richard Dockrey	<i>African-American Folktales for Young Readers</i>	

Third Grade

Author	Title	Year
Adler, David A.	<i>Ben's Trumpet</i>	1991
Johnson, Angela	<i>A Sweet Smell of Roses</i>	2005
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>The Snowy Day</i>	
Kroll, Virginia L.	<i>Who's in Rabbit's House? A Masai Tale</i>	1998
Aardema, Verna	<i>Faraway Drums</i>	1992
Lasky, Kathryn	<i>A Voice of Her Own: The Story of Phillis Wheatley</i>	2005
Adler, David A.	<i>A Picture Book of Thurgood Marshall</i>	1999
Latifah, Queen	<i>Queen of the Scene</i>	2006
Acker, Julius	<i>Adventures of Spider, The West John Henry</i>	1999
Levine, Ellen	<i>African Folktales</i>	2007
Bausum, Ann	<i>Henry's Freedom Box</i>	
Levine, Ellen	<i>Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zerg on the Front Lines... If You Travelled on the Underground Railroad</i>	2005
Cameron, Ann	<i>Julian, Dream Doctor</i>	1993
Mathis, Sharon Bell	<i>The Hundred Penny Box</i>	2006
Cameron, Ann	<i>Julian's Glorious Summer</i>	1987
Mckissack, Patricia C.	<i>Porch Lies: Tales of Slicksters, Tricksters, and Other Wily Characters of Sojourner Truth</i>	2006
Clifton, Lucille	<i>Everett Anderson's Goodbye</i>	1988
Mckissack, Patricia C.	<i>Amistad: The Story of a Slave Ship</i>	2005
Collier, Bryan	<i>Uptown</i>	2003
Mckissack, Patricia C. and Curtis, Gayle	<i>Days of Jubilee: The End of Slavery</i>	2003
Mckissack, Frederick	<i>The Bat Boy and His Violin</i>	2001
Dillion, Leo, and Diane Miller, William	<i>Run a Tan Top: Here's Reinaldo Frederick Douglass: The Last Day of Slavery</i>	2002
Farris, Christine King	<i>Think of That!</i>	1996
Musgrove, Margaret	<i>My Brother Martin</i>	2005
Ford, Juwanda G.	<i>The Spider Weaver</i>	
Nelson, Vaunda Micheaux	<i>Sunday Best</i>	
Griffith, Sherry	<i>Juneteenth</i>	2006
Pardamei, Wilkie	<i>The Buffalo Soldier</i>	2006
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Visiting Langston</i>	2005
Pinkney, Andrea Davis	<i>Seeing Duke Ellington, The Piano Prince</i>	2007
Hooks, Gwendolyn	<i>Tell a Brother and Me The Tale of a Virtuoso</i>	1992
Pinkney, Andrea Davis	<i>Three's A Crowd</i>	2002
Hopkinson, Deborah	<i>Dear Benjamin Banneker</i>	1998
Pinkney, Andrea Jean	<i>From Slave to Soldier: Based on a True Civil War Story</i>	2007
Polakins, Pat	<i>Back Home</i>	1999
Hindsgaul, Faith	<i>Meel Cloath's Way Freedom Quilt</i>	1992
Hockstie, Zola Male and Thomas, Joyce Carol	<i>The Dream of Martin Luther King</i>	1998
San Souci, Robert D.	<i>When Jo Louis Won the Title Six Fools</i>	1996
	<i>The Talking Eggs</i>	2005

Sanders, Nancy I.	<i>D is For Drinking Gourd</i>	2007
Somervill, Barbara A.	<i>Amistad Mutiny: Fighting for Freedom</i>	2005
Step toe, John	<i>Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters</i>	1987
Tarpley, Natasha	<i>Joe-Joe's First Flight</i>	2003
Thomas, Joyce Carol	<i>I Have Heard of a Land</i>	2000
Wahl, Jan	<i>Candy Shop</i>	2005
Walter, Mildred Pitts	<i>Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World</i>	1990
Weatherford, Carole Boston	<i>Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom</i>	2006
Wiles, Deborah	<i>Freedom Summer</i>	2005
Yarbrough, Camile	<i>Cornrows</i>	1997

Grades 4 and 5 Titles

Author	Title	Pub. Date
Birtha, Becky	<i>Grandmama's Pride</i>	2005
Bridges, Ruby	<i>Through My Eyes</i>	1999
Bryan, Ashley	<i>Beath the Story Drum, Pum-Pum</i>	1987
Cameron, Ann	<i>Julian, Secret Agent</i>	1988
Charbonneau, Eileen	<i>Honor to the Hills</i>	1997
Christie, R. Gregory	<i>Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan</i>	2007
Cline-Ransome, Lesa	<i>Satchel Paige</i>	2002
Curtis, Christopher Paul	<i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963</i>	2000
Davis, Ossie	<i>Escape to Freedom: A Play About Young Frederick Douglass</i>	1990
Dawson, George and Glaubman, Richard	<i>Life is So Good</i>	2002
Farmer, Nancy	<i>A Girl Named Disaster</i>	1998
Fenner, Carol	<i>Yolanda's Genius</i>	1997
Flournoy, Valerie	<i>The Best Time of Day</i>	
Freedman, Russell	<i>The Voice Taht Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights</i>	2004
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>For the Love of the Game: Michael Jordan and Me</i>	1997
Grimes, Nikki	<i>Danitra Brown Leaves Town</i>	2002
Hamilton, Virginia	<i>Cousins</i>	1992

Hamilton, Virginia	<i>Drylongso</i>	1997
Hamilton, Virginia	<i>The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales</i>	1993
Haskins, Jim	<i>The Day Martin Luther King Was Shot</i>	1992
Homan, Lynn M. And Reilly, Thomas	<i>Tuskegee Airmen Story</i>	2002
Hopkinson, Deborah	<i>Under the Quilt of Night</i>	2002
Hughes, Langston; Roessel, David, and Rampersad, Arnold, eds.	<i>Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes</i>	2006
Hunter, Bobbi Dooley	<i>The Legend of the African Baobab Tree</i>	1995
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>The Snowy Day</i>	
Lester, Julius	<i>Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue</i>	2005
Lyons, Mary E.	<i>Letters From a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs</i>	2007
McKissack, Patricia C.	<i>Amistad: The Story of a Slave Ship</i>	2005
McKissack, Patricia C.	<i>Scraps of Time: Abby Takes a Stand</i>	2006
McKissack, Patricia C.	<i>Royal Diagires: Nzingha</i>	2000
McKissack, Patricia C.	<i>Hard Labor: The First African-Americans</i>	2004
McKissack, Patricia C.	<i>Loved Best</i>	
McKissack, Patricia C., et al	<i>Black Diamond: The Story of the Negor Baseball Leagues</i>	1998
Medina, Tony	<i>Love to Langston</i>	2006
Miller, William and Christie, Gregory	<i>Richard Wright and the Library Card</i>	
Myers, Walter Dean	<i>The Harlem Hellfighters</i>	2005
Myers, Walter Dean	<i>The Journal of Buddy Owens</i>	
Nelson, Marilyn	<i>Carver: A Life in Poems</i>	1997
Parks, Rosa and Haskins, Jim	<i>Rosa Parks: My Story</i>	1999
Pinkney, Andrea Davis	<i>Ella Fitzgerald: The Tale of a Vocal Virtuoso</i>	
Rappaport, Doreen	<i>Freedom River</i>	2000
Ringgold, Faith	<i>If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks</i>	2002
Robinet, Harriette Gillem	<i>Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule</i>	2000
Robinet, Harriette Gillem	<i>Twelve Travelers, Twenty Horses</i>	2005
Schmidt, Gary D.	<i>Little Bright and the Buckminster Boy</i>	2006
Schroeder, Alan	<i>Satchmo's Blues</i>	1999
Schroeder, Alan	<i>Booker T. Washtington</i>	2005
Taylor, Mildred D.	<i>The Friendship</i>	1998
Towle, Wendy	<i>The Real McCoy: The Life of an African-American Inventor</i>	1995

Turner, G. T.	<i>Take a Walk in Their Shoes</i>	
Walter, Mildred Pitts	<i>Suitcase</i>	2006
Williams, Sherley	<i>Working Cotton</i>	1997
Woodson, Jacqueline	<i>The Other Side</i>	2001



Why Read Aloud to Students?

By Cathy Wishart, Literacy Coach and Amistad Fellow

Studies have demonstrated that reading aloud to students helps all students, not just struggling students, develop specific skills and strategies in reading, such as:

- Involving students in reading for enjoyment
- Demonstrating reading for a purpose
- Providing an adult demonstration of phrased, fluent reading
- Developing a sense of story
- Developing knowledge of written language syntax
- Developing a knowledge of how texts are structured
- Increasing vocabulary
- Expanding linguistic repertoire
- Supporting intertextual ties
- Creating a community of readers through shared enjoyment and shared knowledge
- Making complex ideas available to students
- Promoting oral language development
- Establishing known texts to use as a basis for writing and other activities

Furthermore, studies show that read alouds should not stop at grade 3 or 4. Read alouds have great instructional value throughout high school and even into college, especially for struggling readers.

Some suggested steps in an effective read aloud include the following techniques:

- **Prepare, prepare, prepare!** Do not expect to do a good read aloud if you haven't planned, and certainly if you haven't pre-read the text. This preparation also includes making certain to pick a text you like. If you do not like the text, your body language or voice will give this away. Make sure the text interests and connects with you before you read the text aloud to students.
- **Meaning Statement** – Make a main idea statement that will give the students an idea of what the story is about. Give the statement before or while the students see the cover of the book.
- **Vocabulary** – Choose only two or three words to introduce prior to reading the book. The introduction of too many words will have little to no effect on increasing vocabulary development.
- **Big Ideas** – Talk about any big ideas the text might cover, such as slavery, or women's rights, etc.
- **Preview the book** – if the book has pictures, take a picture walk through part or all of the text. If the book is a chapter book, read the titles of some of the chapters. Ask students for predictions when doing these activities.
- **Content/Vocabulary Questions** – Ask students to recall the meaning of a vocabulary word when it is presented in the story. Ask yourself specific questions out loud that guide your own comprehension. For example, "I wonder what it would feel like if..." or, "I can't imagine how I would feel if that happened to me," or, "I remember when we read... that something similar happened." Acting out your own thinking demonstrates to the students that readers interact with text to gain meaning. When you get to a place that proves or disproves a prediction, encourage students to self-check predictions and explain why they were correct or incorrect.
- **Unusual Language Structures** – If the text uses unusual language structure, such as the word choices indicate the book was written long ago, or every sentence begins with a prepositional phrase, or the poem has a cadence that helps direct word choice, talk about it and point this out.
- **Respond to Student Questions** – You may not be able to respond to all the questions students ask, but do respond to some of them. Take breaks at logical points in the text to answer or discuss questions, Make sure that you don't always answer the questions from the same students – share the wealth of receiving attention from you.

- **Making Connections** – Think aloud about what text-to-self, text-to-text, and/or text-to-world connections you have made reading this book.
- **Take Notes** – the more often you read a specific book, the more difficult it will be to recall your first reactions to the text. Take notes about these reactions for future readings – these first reactions hold the kernels for demonstrating reading skills and strategies you use to students.

In *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers*, authors Dorothy Strickland, Kathy Ganske, and Joanne Monroe point out:

Because struggling readers' experiences with text have so often translated into work rather than fun, a primary objective of the read-aloud should be to engage these students, as well as the rest of the class, in a reading experience that is rewarding because it is meaningful and enjoyable. To make sure students can devote their full attention to the reading and lose themselves in the story, it is a good idea to ask them to set aside competing desk activities, or have them gather on the floor. Then, supplied with a good book, awareness that reading too fast is not a good model and willingness to risk feeling silly by taking on the voices of characters in the story, teachers are ready to model fluent reading. In addition to showing that reading is expressive, the modeling will demonstrate that good readers read in phrases, not word by word, and that the phrase reading, pauses, and change in voice inflection that signal various types of punctuation facilitate the meaning-making process.... Fluent reading should be modeled every day, but it does not have to be done with a lengthy chapter book. Poems and picture books work equally well when time is short. Book talks can also be used to model fluent reading (123).

If you want to have a positive impact on student reading, comprehension, and vocabulary development, prepare for a read aloud and read. Immerse both yourself and your students in the story, and share your thoughts, share yourself with the students. As Jim Trelease points out, "The more you read, the better you get at it. And the better you get at it, the more you read."

Resources

- Benchmark Education Company. "Read About Best Practices in Understanding Read-alouds."
http://www.benchmarkeducation.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4016

- Block, Cathy Collins & Susan E. Israel. "The ABCs of Performing Highly Effective Think-Alouds." *The Reading Teacher*. 01 Oct. 2004.
- Strickland, Dorothy, Kathy Ganske, & Joanne Monroe. *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention* 3 – 6. International Reading Assoc. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Pub., 2002.
- Trelease, Jim. *The Read Aloud Handbook*. NY: Penguin Books, 2003.